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Futuwwa as the Noblest Character Traits (*Makārim al-Akhlāq*) in Anṣārī's *Manāzil al-Sā'irīn* with al-Kāshānī's Commentary

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Abstract

This paper investigates the Sufi concept of *futuwwa* (spiritual chivalry) in 'Abdallāh Anṣārī al-Harawī's (d. 481/1089) classic manual of spiritual wayfaring, *Manāzil al-Sā'irīn* ("Stations of the Wayfarers"). After briefly taking stock of the earliest statements on *futuwwa* cited in al-Qushayrī's (d. 465/1073) *Risāla*, we take a closer look at the *Manāzil*'s commentarial tradition, offering a complete translation of both Anṣārī's chapter on the subject and 'Abd al-Razzāq al-Kāshānī's (d. 731/1330) commentary. In Anṣārī's view, there are three aspects to *futuwwa*. The first aspect is in relation to oneself, the second is in relation to others, and the third is in relation to God. *Futuwwa* in relation to oneself is to accept trials and tribulations in stride. With respect to others, it is to hold oneself but not others accountable, seeing outward injuries as inward blessings. With respect to one's relation to God, it is to abandon means and ends, relying on God alone through the heart's reception, not the intellect's endeavour. The discussion section offers an ontological-ethical investigation through a close reading of the text and its commentary, then offers a broader perspective on *futuwwa*, which is tantamount to the noblest character traits (*makārim al-akhlāq*). In the final analysis, *futuwwa* symbolises the quality of the spiritual warrior who conquers his lower self to attain the *makārim al-akhlāq*.

Keywords

Sufism – ethics – wayfaring – generosity – trial – altruism – spiritual chivalry – Anṣarī – al-Kāshānī

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الخلاصة

تبحث هذه الورقة المفهوم الصوفي للفتوة في كتاب عبد الله الأنصاري الهروي (ت. 1089/481) الشهير، **منازل السائرين**. بعد إجراء تقييم موجز لما ورده عن الفتوة في **رسالة** القشيري (ت. 1073/465)، نلقي نظرة معمقة في تراث شرح **منازل السائرين**، حيث نقدم ترجمة كاملة لكل من فصل الأنصاري في هذا الموضوع وشرح عبد الرزاق الكاشاني (ت. 1330/731). هناك ثلاثة جوانب للفتوة في نظر الأنصاري. الجانب الأول يتعلق بالنفس، والجانب الثاني يتعلق بالآخرين، والثالث يتعلق بالله. الفتوة فيما يتعلق بالنفس عبارة عن قبول الابتلاءات والمحن بالرضى. وفيما يتعلق بالآخرين، فهي عبارة عن محاسبة النفس دون إلقاء اللوم على الآخرين، مع اعتبار النقم الخارجية نوع من النِعَم الداخلية. وفيما يتعلق بعلاقة المرء بالله، فالفروسية عبارة عن طرح الوسائل والغايات، والتوكل على الله وحده من خلال مشاهدة القلب دون الاستدلال بالعقل. يقدم قسم المناقشة تحليلا وجوديًا أخلاقيًا من خلال قراءة متأنية للنص وشرحه، ثم يقدم منظورًا أوسع للفتوة بوصفها واحدة من مكارم الأخلاق. في التحليل الختامي، ترمز الفتوة إلى صفة من صفات السالك إلى الله الذي ينتصر على نفسه الأمارة بالسوء ليبلغ مكارم الأخلاق.

الكلمات المفتاحية

التصوف – الأخلاق – السير إلى الله – الكرم – الابتلاء – الإيثار – الفروسية الروحية – الأنصاري – الكاشاني

1 Introduction

The concept of *futuwwa* (spiritual chivalry) predates Islam, designating the heroic ideal of pre-Islamic Arabia (Loewen 2003, 1), often revolving around the person of Ḥātim al-Ṭā'ī (d. 605), a man celebrated for his generosity.[1] The most prominent figure in the Islamic era is Prophet Muḥammad's cousin and son-in-law ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib (d. 40/661). ʿAlī was famed for his valour and described in the Prophet's famous maxim, "There is no (chivalrous) youth (*fatā*) but ʿAlī, no sword but the *Ẓulfiqār*" (Tirmidhī 1938, 1561). The Qur'ān also refers to Abraham as a *fatā* (young man) and mentions the people of the cave (*aṣḥāb al-kahf*) as a group of pious young men (*fityān*) facing persecution on account of their beliefs. As the Qur'ān reports, they fell into a three-hundred-year long slumber in a cave without aging, so God called them youths on account of their superlative faith and robust determination.

1 See Kāshifī's *Risāla-yi Ḥatmiyya* for a biography of Ḥātim al-Ṭā'ī in the context of *futuwwa* literature.

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Fatā (pl. *fityān*) literally means "young man." When it is used figuratively, it denotes a host of human virtues and noble character traits, particularly, chivalry, honour, courage, generosity, service, altruism, and hospitality. As for its association with youthfulness, it intimates the purity and virility of youth, merging with the blossoming of potential and the springtime of life. Thus, the people of paradise are described as having youthfulness, surrounded by either maidens or eternal youth (*wildān*). *Futuwwa* also has a socio-political dimension which is a type of spiritual and fraternal bond as demonstrated by the people of the cave. Secondly, the very notion of *futuwwa* in ʿAlī is coupled with the image of his sword, *ẓulfiqār*, which invokes the image of heroism on the battlefield, protectiveness, and chivalry. However, it was his noble character and spiritual courage that was the mark of *futuwwa*, as exemplified in this story mentioned by al-Sulamī (d. 412/1021):

> ʿAlī encountered a handsome young warrior who moved to attack him. His heart filled with pity and compassion for the misguided youth. He cried out, "O young man, do you not know who I am? I am ʿAlī, the invincible. No one can escape my sword. Go and save yourself!" The young man continued towards him, sword in hand. "Why do you wish to attack me?" ʿAlī said, "Why do you wish to die?"
>
> The young man answered, "I love a girl who vowed she would be mine if I killed you."
>
> "But what if you die?" ʿAlī asked.
>
> "What is better than dying for the one I love?" He replied. "At worst, would I not be relieved of the agonies of love?"
>
> Hearing his response, ʿAlī dropped his sword, took off his helmet, and stretched out his head like a sacrificial lamb.
>
> Confronted by such an action, the love in the young man was transformed into love for ʿAlī and the One whom ʿAlī loves.
>
> AL-SULAMĪ 1983, 14

From this, we can glean a few salient features of *futuwwa*, namely, that it represents *adab*, honourable conduct and a moral code, but Anṣārī categorises it in the *Manāzil* as a station of moral character among the stations of spiritual wayfaring.[2] As with many of the essential terms of Sufism, the term has Qur'ānic roots. Referring to Abraham, al-Qushayrī (d. 465/1073) in his *Risāla*

2 Wayfaring is the spiritual movement through states (*aḥwāl*), stations, and the embodiment of virtues and divine names. Anṣārī writes, every aspect of nearness is a *manzil* (station) and when one becomes established therein, it is called a *maqām* (rank).

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writes, "*Fatā* is the one who breaks idols … and the idol of each man is his ego." The first Sufi treatise written on the topic of *futuwwa* was *Kitāb al-futuwwa* by al-Qushayrī's teacher, Abū ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Sulamī. Ibn ʿArabī (d. 638/1240) also devoted three chapters on the subject (see *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya*, 1999: 1:42, 241–244, 146–147, 2:231–234). ʿAbd al-Razzāq al-Kāshānī (d. 731/1330), a follower of Ibn al-ʿArabī, also penned *Tuḥfat al-Ikhwān fī Khaṣāʾiṣ al-Fityān* delineating the qualities that one must develop to travel on the spiritual path. Around the same time, ʿUmar al-Suhrawardī (d. 632/1234) (al-Suhrawardī 1973, 89–166) composed the first Persian treatise on the subject, *Kitāb fī l-Futuwwat*. The most comprehensive treatment in Persian on *futuwwa*, or *jawānmardī*, is the *Futuwwat-nāmah-i Sulṭānī* by Ḥusayn Vāʿiẓ-i Kāshifī (d. 910/1504).

In modern scholarship, Lloyd Ridgeon traces the history of *futuwwa* in Iran in his *Morals and Mysticism in Persian Sufism*, and in his work, *Jawanmardi: A Sufi Code of Honour*, he introduces and translates three key treatises on *futuwwa* including al-Suhrawardī's *Kitāb fī l-futuwwat*. Arley Loewen's study on Kāshifī's *Futuwwat-nāmah-i Sulṭānī* and Eric Ohlander's study on *Futuwwat-nāma* of Najm al-Dīn Zarkūb (d. 618/1221) of Tabriz also examine the historical development of *futuwwa* in Sufi discourse. However, Cyrus Zargar's chapter in *The Polished Mirror* is the first of its kind on Ānṣarī's legacy on the topic of *futuwwa*, relating it to Sufi themes of *muruwwa* ("maniliness") and the *qalandar*, or one who has "open disregard for social convention in the cause of 'true' religious love" (Karamustafa 2006, 33).

Within the genre of manuals of spiritual wayfaring, *futuwwa* appears in ʿAbdallāh Anṣārī's (d. 481/1089) celebrated *Manāzil al-Sāʾirīn* as well as al-Qushayrī's *Risāla* which in many ways is foundational in the development of wayfaring manuals, although al-Qushayrī's systematisation is not as sophisticated as Anṣārī's. Al-Sulamī notes, it was Dhū l-Nūn (d. 245/859 or 248/862) who was the first to classify the "order of the states (*tartīb al-aḥwāl*) and the stations of the fold of sanctity (*maqāmāt al-wilāya*)" (Khalil 2018, 80). Al-Muḥāsibī (d. 243/857), Dhū l-Nūn's contemporary, also played a critical role in developing the framework of the waystations, in addition to Abū Saʿīd Kharrāz (d. 286/899) in his *Kitāb al-Ṣidq* ("The Book of Truthfulness") and Abū Nuʿaym al-Iṣfahānī (d. 430/1038) in *Ḥilyat al-Awliyāʾ wa-Ṭabaqāt al-Aṣfiyāʾ* ("The Ornament of the Saints and Ranks of the Pure") (see Picken 2010).

2 Early Sufi Sayings on *futuwwa*

Al-Qushayrī's *Risāla* is no doubt one of the foundational works of Sufism. On the topic of *futuwwa*, al-Qushayrī collates a large sample of sayings from the

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earliest masters of Sufism, and this precious anthology has been, to a large extent, incorporated in Anṣārī's own exposition. Perhaps without his efforts, many of these insights would have been lost. Al-Qushayrī writes:

> The foundation of chivalry is that the servant of God always exerts himself in the service of others. I heard al-Fuḍayl [b. ʿIyāḍ] say: "Chivalry means forgetting the faults of your brothers." Abū Bakr al-Warrāq said: "The chivalrous person has no enemies whatsoever." Muḥammad b. ʿAlī al-Tirmidhī said: "Chivalry means that you are your own enemy before God." It is also said: "The chivalrous person cannot be an enemy to anyone [but himself]." I heard the master Abū ʿAlī al-Daqqāq—may God have mercy on him—say: "I heard al-Nasrabādhī say: 'The Men of the Cave were called "[chivalrous] young men" because they believed in their Lord without any intermediary.'" It is said that the chivalrous person is one who has broken idols, for God Most High said: "We heard a [chivalrous] young man named Abraham making mention of them [the idols of his people]"; He also said: "He broke them [the idols] into fragments." The idol of every person is his own self, therefore he who refuses to obey his passions is chivalrous in truth. Al-Ḥārith al-Muḥāsibī said: "Chivalry means that you act justly, while not demanding justice for your own self." ʿAmr b. ʿUthmān al-Makkī said: "Chivalry means having good moral character."
>
> Al-Junayd said: "Chivalry means keeping trouble [away from others] and spending magnanimously [on them]." Sahl b. ʿAbdallāh [al-Tustarī] said: "Chivalry means holding on to the custom of the Prophet." It is said: "Chivalry is being faithful and observing the limits [set by God]." It is said: "Chivalry is a virtue that you perform without attributing it to yourself." It is said: "Chivalry is that you do not hide from those who seek your assistance." It is said: "Chivalry is that you neither hoard [wealth] nor seek excuses [not to give it away to those in need]." It is said: "Chivalry is showing [your gratitude for God's bounty] and hiding the hardship [inflicted upon you by God]." It is said: "Chivalry is when you invite ten guests [for a meal] and care not whether eleven or nine actually come." It is said: "Chivalry is never giving preference [for one thing or person over the other]."

Finally, al-Qushayrī relates that Shaqīq al-Balkhī (d. 194/810) inquired Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq (d. 148/765), "O son of the Messenger's daughter, what, then, do you regard as chivalry?" He answered, "If we are given something, we prefer [to give it to someone else], and if we are denied we are grateful" (Knysh 2007, 237–238; see also Von Schlegell 1992).

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3 ʿAbdallāh Anṣārī al-Harawī, the Sage of Herat

Abū Ismāʿīl ʿAbdallāh Anṣārī al-Harawī (d.481/1089), an illustrious scholar and literary genius in Herat, was not only a Sufi master of the highest order but also a devoted Ḥanbalī traditionist. Anṣārī's lineage traces back to the venerable companion of the Prophet, Abū Ayyūb al-Anṣārī (d. 52/672). Anṣārī trained in the traditional religious disciplines and was also a prolific writer and literary savant, composing masterful prose and poetry in both Persian and Arabic. Jamī's (d. 898/1492) *Nafaḥāt al-Uns* and ʿAttār's (d. 618/1221) *Tadhkirat al-Awliyā'* contain detailed information on his life and works. More recently, A. G. Ravan Farhadi's has written a biography, *ʿAbdullah Anṣārī of Herāt*, and Nahid Angha composed an excellent study with annotated English translation of *Sad Maydan*. Anṣārī's *Manāzil al-Sā'irīn* is the consummate manual of spiritual wayfaring in which he identifies one hundred spiritual stations. As mentioned, he is not the first to classify the stations, but his exposition is the most comprehensive and detailed of any such work.

Anṣārī's premise in the *Manāzil* is that the human being must undergo an inward, spiritual journey in order to reach the highest level of union (*tawḥīd*) with God, and in doing so one experiences a set of states and stations commensurate with his level of proximity. This spiritual progression is known as wayfaring (*sayr wa-sulūk*) and the wayfarer (*sālik*) transforms, acquiring realities known as *manāzil* or *maqamāt*.[3] Earlier authors in this genre such as al-Sulamī categorised these stations as belonging to conduct (*adab*), character traits (*akhlāq*), and states (*aḥwāl*). However, Anṣārī's opus divides the stations into ten categories beginning with the Preliminaries (*bidāyāt*), followed by the Doors (*abwāb*), Interactions (*muʿāmālāt*), Morals (*akhlāq*), Roots (*uṣūl*), Valleys (*awdiya*), States (*aḥwāl*), Saintly Attributes (*walāyāt*), Realities (*ḥaqā'iq*), and Ends (*nihāyāt*). The stations were further divided into three degrees, that which pertained to the laypeople, the elect, and the foremost of the elect. It is important to note that this was not Anṣārī's first work elaborating the waystations, but was preceded by his own treatise, *Ṣad Maydān* ("One Hundred Grounds"), written in Persian some twenty years earlier (see Angha 2010; Farhadi 1996 and 1999, 391–92; Laugier de Beaureceuil 1982, 1:187–190). Farhadi writes: "His *One Hundred Grounds*, however, retains its importance as

3 ʿAbd al-Razzāq al-Kāshānī, was also a Sufi lexicographer. He defined these key terms in the following: "A state (*ḥāl*) is that which enters upon the heart purely as a bestowal, without exertion or bringing it upon oneself, such as sorrow, fear, expansion, contraction, or tasting. It disappears when the attributes of the soul become manifest, whether or not it is followed by a similar state later. When it becomes permanent and thus a disposition (*malaka*), then it is called a station (*maqām*)" (al-Kāshānī 1977, 21, cited in Zargar 2017, 207).

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the first didactic treatise on Sufism to be written in Persian, and specifically intended to serve as a mnemonic manual for mystics" (Farhādī 1999, 387).

Like *Ṣad Maydān*, *Manāzil* was also a didactic work written in mnemonic style, as Anṣārī states in the introduction, "A group of Sufis from Herat and elsewhere were eager to know about the stations of the wayfarers on [the path] to God. Their request that I should to explain that knowledge which could serve as a lamppost on the spiritual path was long overdue" (Ānṣarī 1993, 13). Nahid Angha notes, "The poetic style of the rhyming prose he [Anṣārī] employed in *Ṣad Maydān* was to usher in a new literary style in Persian literature, soon to be followed by Ṣūfī writers and sages such as Saʿdī of Shīrāz in his *Gulistān*" (Dallh 2013, 477).

There are several popular commentaries of the *Manāzil*, firstly by two followers of Ibn al-ʿArabī, ʿAfīf al-Dīn al-Tilimsānī (d. 690/1291) and ʿAbd al-Razzāq al-Kāshānī, whose *futuwwa* exegesis is examined in this study, then an important critical commentary by the Ḥanbalī scholar Ibn al-Qayyim al-Jawziyya (d. 751/1350) whose *Madārij al-Sālikīn* aims to rectify the popular distortions of Sufi tropes during and after Ānṣarī's time. Ovamir Anjum notes, "*Madārij* is a strong critique not of Sufis per se but of central Sufi *developments* in both the intoxicated, passion-laced tradition of al-Harawī [Ānṣārī] as well as the Neoplatonic tradition of monists like Ibn ʿArabī and his followers" (Anjum 2020, 49).

Anṣārī incorporates many of the statements of his predecessors in his exposition of *futuwwa*, placing it as the fourth station in *Ṣad Maydān*, and thirty-ninth in the *Manāzil*, the penultimate station in the section on Morals (*akhlāq*). It occurs before the station of joy (*inbisāṭ*) and after humility (*tawāḍuʿ*), good character (*khulq*), preferring others over oneself (*īthār*), and truthfulness (*ṣidq*), essentially encompassing them all.

4 Al-Ānṣārī's Chapter on *Futuwwa* with al-Kāshānī's Commentary (Ānṣārī 1993, 248–253)

> They were youth who believed in their Lord, and We increased them in Guidance.
>
> Q 8:13

Al-Kāshānī: *Futuwwa* is a term for the station of a pure heart devoid of attributes of the self. That purity is the guidance augmented after faith. For this reason, when Moses asked God about *futuwwa*, God replied, "That you return your soul to Me pure, as you received it pure."

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> The essence (*nukta*) of *futuwwa* is that you do not see yourself being owed any favour, nor that you demand any right.

Al-Kāshānī: The *nukta* of a thing is its essence and what is meant by it, or its noblest quality, like the pupil of the eye. Thus, the noblest aspect of *futuwwa* is its most desirable and choice quality by which it is distinguished, namely, that you do not see yourself being owed any favour nor demand any right over others, but that you owe everyone else their rights. The distinct aspect of purity is that you see others' favours upon you, that you annihilate the satanic ego, the rust on the lower self and its highhandedness.

> The first degree of *futuwwa* is to leave quarrelling, fault-finding, and holding grudges.

Al-Kāshānī: That is, one must not outwardly quarrel with someone concerning one's right nor hold in his heart that he possesses a right over another since doing so will occupy the heart with one's adversary. If you see your brother committing a mistake, you must disregard it as if you have not seen it, so that he does not feel obliged to apologise or feel aggrieved. You must also forget the wrongdoing of your companions and all those who have wronged you so that the purity of their companionship returns.

> The second degree is that you draw near to those who have become hardened towards you, honour those who have insulted you and pardon those who have wronged you—magnanimously and not out of self-restraint, but with a liberality that exceeds mere toleration.

Al-Kāshānī: That you behave well with those who have wronged you and that their actions, in fact, assist you in disciplining the soul and training it. Thus, one should honour such a person and bring them near. Similarly, when you honour those who insult you, you must see that they are giving it what it deserves and helping it reach its Lord. He has been entrusted to you from your Lord so you must honour him, since he is the medium between you and your Lord, insofar as God's will is dispensed through him. Thereafter, you must pardon one who wrongs you, saying that God has sent him to me to expiate my sins of which this is an atonement (*kaffāra*). Were it not for my sins, God would not have sent you to me and burdened you with such a responsibility, imposing on you to carry out His order with respect to me. Therefore, it is on account of my sin that has caused you to act this way towards me, so it is I who must seek your pardon and forgiveness.

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All of this must incorporate liberality and good nature, not suppression of anger, otherwise your outward contradicts your inward, insofar as your inward is filled with anger. That is, you repress it and you indulge your companion, showing a display of pleasure while your inward is vindictive.

"Magnanimously … [not] toleration" means that one overlooks faults with good nature (*ṭīb al-nafs*), showing an inward love that manifests outwardly, seeking his affection as you have shown him, not tolerating pain and resentment that you hide and keep inside. It is from the purity of your inward that is safe from contamination and pain, keeping a state of satisfaction and pleasure. This is based on the belief that it is *you* who have caused him pain due to your sin since he is the purifier of your sin by God's command. Thus, he is the affectionate friend sent by God who watches over you. The sin is from you, and the purification and rectification is from him.

> The third degree is that one is not attached to the path through [rational] proofs.

Al-Kāshānī: That one does not adhere to rational proofs in wayfaring, because the intellect does not protect one from becoming veiled and does not attain unveiling; it is not that one does not adhere to the proofs from the Shaykh or the Book and Sunna. Guidance and proofs of the Shaykh are at times mandatory in wayfaring. Quoting what appears at the end of this chapter, 'He who seeks the light of reality on the basis of rational proofs cannot claim *futuwwa*. "Proof" refers to intellectual proofs, which is often separate from the heart. But God combines the heart in the light of unveiling and gnosis of God. Therefore, adhere to all that tethers you to God and leave all that separates you [from Him]. Do not pervert God's call with a substitute, for if you respond to God's call and traverse His path, you must purge your intention for the sake of God and purify your heart from everything other than Him, so that you become His sincere servant. But if you admix your response by a substitute or motive, you will become the servant of the intended substitute, not God. *Futuwwa* is liberation from the yoke of the world.

Do not stop at the form in your witnessing of reality. Form is createdness, whether identical to Him or other than Him, one must not glance at otherness whereby it becomes coloured and veiled from God. Witnessing annihilates the traces of otherness otherwise it is not true [witnessing].

> Know that he who obliges his enemy to seek pardon and does not feel ashamed from his apology has not smelled the fragrance of *futuwwa*.

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Al-Kāshānī: This is on account of the two previous degrees, which can be summarised as forbearance of injury, overlooking mistakes with a purity of heart. Thus, one is not agonised by the injuries dealt by an adversary and displays satisfaction so that he is not in need of an excuse. Furthermore, he is the first to apologise because of his pure heart and love, as mentioned. If he does not, so that the adversary feels the need to apologise and seek pardon, he must feel ashamed, otherwise, he will not have even smelled the fragrance of *futuwwa*. That is, there will be no trace of *futuwwa* in such a person. This is good behaviour with an adversary, so what to speak about a friend?

> With respect to special knowledge, he who seeks the light of reality on the leg of proofs can never lay claim to *futuwwa*.

Al-Kāshānī: This is the conclusion of the third degree because the possessor of *futuwwa* sees God through his pure heart more clearly than the sun. If he seeks Him through the light of the intellect, it is like searching for the sun with a lamp. *Futuwwa* requires magnanimity of heart, the annihilation of everything in God by true love. Thus, he who uses rational argumentation to prove the existence of the Beloved by something else is far from *muruwwa*, let alone *futuwwa*. The accomplished commentator, ʿAfīf al-Dīn al-Tilimsānī, has gleaned a subtle point in saying, "If it is not permissible to oblige your enemy to apologise, then how can you oblige the Prophet to condescend to the limits of your mind."

5 Discussion on *futuwwa* as Noblest Character Traits (*makārim al-akhlāq*)

The Prophet said, "For every truth there is a reality!" (*li-kulli ḥāqq haqīqa*).[4] The "reality" is the essence or inner mystery of a thing. What then is the reality of *futuwwa*? We find that many of the earliest masters of Sufism offered some

4 It is related from Ṣāliḥ ibn Mismār that the Prophet asked al-Ḥārith ibn Mālik, "How are you? or what is your state?" He replied, "Imbued with faith, O Prophet of God." He asked, "Are you truly imbued with faith?" He said, "Indeed!" The Prophet said, "For every truth there is a reality so what is the reality of [your faith]?" He replied, "I have abstained from the world and kept vigil during my nights and remained thirsty during my days. It is as if I am witnessing the Throne of my Lord, the Mighty and Magnificent. It is as if I see the people of paradise visiting each other and hear the wailing of the people of hell." The Prophet then said, "He is a believer whose heart God has illuminated" (al-Iṣfahānī 2011, 247).

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definition of *futuwwa*. Its scope is vast and difficult to define precisely, although its key concepts are service, altruism, overlooking the faults of others, magnanimity, gratitude, and hiding hardship. If we are to locate the root quality of all of these traits, after having examined Anṣārī's chapter, we find that they are closely related to *karam*, which indicates both generosity and nobility. Specifically, this refers to the noble virtues called the *makārim al-akhlāq*, as mentioned by the Prophet and exemplified by his character, "I have not been sent but to perfect the noble character traits" (Ibn Ḥanbal 2009, 8595). Similarly, one can get a sense of these traits in the supplication of the Prophet's great-grandson, ʿAlī b. al-Ḥusayn (d. 95/712), where he says,

> O God, deposit in me no quality for which I will be faulted,
> unless You set it right, no flaw for which I will be blamed,
> unless You make it beautiful, no deficient noble trait, unless You complete it!
> O God, bless Muḥammad and his Household
> and point me straight to resist him who is dishonest toward me with good counsel,
> repay him who separates from me with gentle devotion,
> reward him who deprives me with free giving,
> recompense him who cuts me off with joining,
> oppose him who slanders me with excellent mention,
> give thanks for good and shut my eyes to evil!
>
> ʿALĪ B. AL-ḤUSAYN, supplication 20

This description, even if it is not framed as *futuwwa*, is revealing of its very spirit, which is a type of spiritual courage whereby one reciprocates a vice with its contrary virtue. Rather than seeking recompense of an equal measure, the injured shows magnanimity and generosity, not only in forgiving but also repaying it with goodness. If the root of *futuwwa* is courage, then its heart is generosity since courage is the cardinal virtue from which generosity originates. The highest type of courage is self-sacrifice and the preference of others over oneself.

In Anṣārī's exposition, *futuwwa* is epitomised as the noblest character traits (*makārim al-akhlāq*), or the sublime morality of the prophets which is **to repay injury with goodness**. In contrast to the normative ethical virtues (*faḍāʿil al-akhlāq*), the *makārim* are subtler and more refined. Even the prophets before Prophet Muḥammad conducted themselves with the *makārim*. In the Bible, Jesus says, "You have heard that it was said, 'Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.' But I tell you, do not resist an evil person. If anyone slaps you on the

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right cheek, turn to them the other cheek also. And if anyone wants to sue you and take your shirt, hand over your coat as well" (Bible: Matthew 5:38–40). In the story of Joseph in the Qur'ān, when his brothers, "took [Joseph] away with them and resolved upon throwing him into the hidden depths of a well," (Q 12:15), he said to them when they reunited in his court seeking his assistance, "There is no blame upon you this day. God will forgive you; He is the Most merciful" (Q 12:15).

The Prophet of Islam said, "A man's nobility is his religion" (Ibn Ḥanbal 2009, no. 8782), or Imām ʿAlī said, "Rushing to forgive is of the morals of the generous and rushing to take revenge is the habit of the vile" (al-Āmidī 2000, no. 1566), and "He who does not repay bad with good is not of the noble" (al-Āmidī 2000, no. 8958), and his son, Ḥasan stated, "He who counts his favours destroys his own generosity" (Majlisī 1983, 78:113, no. 7). Because of the numerous benefits of *karam*, the Arabs named the grapevine *karm*. Abū Bakr said that it is called *karm* because wine, which derives from it, encourages one to be generous and liberal and enjoins the noblest traits. Furthermore, the Arabs called it thus because its bunches are lowered when ripened, its benefits plentiful in all states, and it does not have thorns, which vexes its picker (Ibn Manẓūr 1996, 12:78).

Going back to Anṣārī's text, it is clear to see that his presentation of *futuwwa*, embraces three aspects of the *makārim al-akhlāq*: the first is in relation to oneself, the second is in relation to others, and the third is in relation to God. As for the first, when one attributes no virtue to oneself, demands no right over others, leaving quarreling and fault-finding, the soul finds clarity and repose in and of itself, whatever good or evil comes its way. The nobility of self is proportional to perceiving the triviality of tribulation, as Imām ʿAlī says, "He who honours his soul, the world becomes small in his eyes" (Āmidī 2000, no. 9130). Thus, one who possesses *futuwwa* is generous of self, graciously overlooking the faults of others.

The second aspect is to see that the trial is a purification and the enemy is a friend sent to you by God. Every injury is God's special care and attention to the spiritual development of His servant, as the famous Sufi Poet Rūmī says, "The wound is the place where the Light enters you" (Rūmī 1925, section 149). Thus, *futuwwa* is to see divine grace and generosity as it manifests in both beatific and majestic theophanies. Only the noble and generous self recognises divine trials as favours, and thereafter, shows gratefulness in all conditions. In other words, only the generous recognise generosity, both in its hidden and manifest forms.

The third aspect is in relation to the gnosis of God which is to dispense with rational proofs. The intellect, which is God's gift, has been created to perceive reality. However, God, who is the ultimate reality has no like and cannot be

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perceived by a created thing. Thus, the noble path with respect to the gnosis of God is to seek His countenance only from Him directly and not by means of a created thing. God is known only through Himself. If it is not permissible to oblige your enemy to offer an apology, then how can you oblige God to be known through the confines of the intellect? God is known as He wishes to be known to you, but not because you have exercised your mind or exerted efforts in spiritual disciplines. *Futuwwa* is to disregard one's own efforts on the path since only the noble soul is indifferent to its own virtues and detached from its own ideas. Thus, *futuwwa* is the submission of the intellect to the heart, which is the Throne of God and the place where He chooses to manifest Himself, as the *ḥadīth qudsī* states, "Neither My heaven nor My earth embraces Me, but the heart of My servant with faith does embrace Me" (al-Ghazālī 1986, 3:12). What the intellect perceives by way of rational proofs is a construct of the mind and not the Real, but the chivalrous is one who abandons means and ends, seeking God for God, by God.

This final stage and the highest meaning of the *makārim al-akhlāq* is to adorn oneself with divine attributes through the transformation of human qualities. The Prophet said, "Assume the characteristics of God (*takhallaqu bi-akhlāq Allāh*)" (al-Ghazālī 1986, 4:61). God then adorns the servant with His own attributes after the annihilation of the aspect of humanness and the realisation of complete servitude. In the famous *ḥadīth qudṣī*, God says, "My servant only comes closer to Me by his acts of supererogatory prayers until I love him. When I love him, I become his hearing by which he hears, his sight by which he sees, his tongue by which he speaks, his hand by which he strikes, and his foot by which he walks" (al-Bukhārī 1987, 5: 2384–85). Finally, since generosity is a complete circle, whose beginning is giving and its completion is receiving, the generous and noble soul is not complete until he receives from God and abandons relying on his own efforts. He realises that every good belongs to God alone and that He is the author of its dispensation, so the servant places himself in a state of receiving. Even his giving to others is from the power that God has endowed him to give. Thus, he has received all along, in his giving, receiving, and striving.

6 Conclusion

Anṣārī's presentation of *futuwwa* culminates with the most sublime morality, the *makārim al-akhlāq*, which can be summarised in the following: The essential nobility of the self is not vexed by the trials and tribulations of life. In view of others, the self holds itself accountable but not others, on whose behalf it

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apologises, since their outward injuries are inward blessings. In view of its relation to God, it abandons means and ends, relying on God alone from the heart's reception, not the intellect's endeavours.

However, one key question remains: if *futuwwa* is framed simply as the *makārim al-akhlāq*, why not simply describe them as *makārim* rather than introduce the term *futuwwa*? In other words, what is the relation between the heroic aspect of chivalry and the *makārim*? The answer lies in the fact that the *makārim*, being the highest ideals of Islam, cannot be attained except through *jihād al-nafs*, which is spiritual warfare or struggle against the self, exemplified in the concept of *futuwwa*. It is related, "The Prophet of God dispatched a contingent of the army (to the battlefront). Upon their return, he said: 'Blessed are those who have performed the minor *jihād* and have yet to perform the major *jihād*.' When asked, 'What is the major *jihād*?' the Prophet replied: 'The *jihād* of the self.'" (al-Ṣadūq 2009, 160). The Qur'ān says, "Indeed the soul commands to evil" (Q 12:53), and the Prophet said, "Your greatest enemy is the very soul between your two sides" (Rayshahrī 2001, 6:2439). Thus, the image of Imām 'Alī's *futuwwa* coupled with his sword refers not only to his chivalry on the battlefield, but his fortitude in fighting his lower soul. Imām 'Alī said, "Struggle against your soul in obeying God, just as one fights an enemy and overcomes it. The strongest of people is one who has triumphed over his self" (Āmidī 2000, no. 4761).

The lower soul not only commands to evil but is the complete manifestation of the human ego. So long as the ego is dominant, the heart will never prevail. One will never reach the essence of servitude nor will he taste from the fruits of the *makārim*. From one perspective, *futuwwa* embodies the *makārim*, but from another perspective, *futuwwa* is the means by which one enters the *makārim*. *Futuwwa* is symbolic of the spiritual warrior who is victorious in the greater *jihād*, so that ultimately God adorns him with *makārim al-akhlāq*. Describing the spiritual trajectory of the wayfarer, Imām 'Alī said, "He revived his intellect and mortified his soul until his baseness became refined and his coarseness became subtle. Then, an effulgence, like lightning, flashed with an intense brightness, opening doors and leading him to the door of safety and permanence. Now his feet, carrying his body, have become firmly rooted in the position of safety and comfort on account of how he engaged his heart and earned the good pleasure of his Lord" ('Alī b. Abī Ṭālib 2004, 337).

Finally, it should be noted that the *Manāzil* cannot be read sequentially, either with respect to each station or within a particular station. Anṣārī describes overlapping realities that move inwardly according to degrees of perfection and subtlety. Thus, when he describes the states in terms of common, elite, or foremost, these are simply didactic categorisations and methodological

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tools. The true nature of spiritual wayfaring is nonlinear and differs according to each soul, its particular trajectory, and its refinement, not to mention the nature of the spiritual guidance of the shaykh and his own particular arrival and methodology. Ultimately, these realities, states, and stations originate and return to God alone as He moves the servant as He desires, as "The servant is between the two fingers of the All-merciful" (Muslim 1930, no. 2654).

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